

URBAN EXPANSION AND RURAL SPATIAL CHAOS IN THE FRINGE AREA

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Abstract

Due to the constant increase in human population, man, citizen of the planet Earth, faces many momentous questions and challenges. First of all, they concern problems of accommodation, sustenance, proper health care, education, leisure, transport, development of technical infrastructure, etc.

It seems, however, that the pace of progress and the accumulation of new challenges related to the needs of modernising and developing towns significantly exceed the existing capabilities of planning processes and work. Newer and newer investment projects always seem to be one step ahead of these possibilities.

It is also noted that despite the great progress of civilization, life in cities does not become easier, but, on the contrary, more and more difficult. Therefore, city dwellers either fully or partially run away from them, seeking an opportunity to live in hitherto rural areas close to nature. Above all a tempting target for city dwellers have become villages surrounding these cities. As a result of this complex process, the nearest villages become the suburbs of cities with detached houses, in a sense blocking the development of these cities. Thus, existing rural areas cease to be such areas, losing the title of host sites.

All of this is a kind of a trap as simultaneously these phenomena become unrestrained and generate spatial chaos. The more so that the chaos also affects interpersonal relationships, the quality of which is influenced by cultural differences as well as lifestyle. Nowadays the problem exists in most Polish cities, but observation in this article is limited to Cracow and Lesser Poland only.

Introduction

There have always been problems in the rural-urban fringe. Cities — due to their civilizational and political status — for most of history have acted as superior to villages (this claim is simplified out of necessity). Thus, they often forced the annexation of rural areas, although sometimes, for various reasons, those processes were perfectly natural (beginning with

settlements beyond the town walls absorbed by the town itself). Economic and political determinants, including the size of cities play a key role in the process of those transformations. A dominant city in Lesser Poland is obviously Cracow. Among other big cities in the region (over 20,000 inhabitants) there are Tarnów, Nowy Sącz, Nowy Targ, Oświęcim, Chrzanów, Andrychów, Bochnia, Zakopane, Miechów. There are 43 smaller towns (of fewer than 20,000 inhabitants according to the Central Statistical Office)¹ in Lesser Poland².

Administrative and constitutional transformations can be considered as the main ones in Poland. One can (conventionally) distinguish the following periods here: 1) since the end of World War II (the transition from capitalism to socialism) until 1975; 2) in 1975 communes returned to existence and a new administrative division was introduced (47 provinces instead of the current 17 ones and liquidation of districts) — until then small towns existed in the contemporary conditions of the territorial division; 3) the transition from a socialist economy to the capitalist one (1989), we are witnessing the second administrative and constitutional transformation (restoration of districts and instead of provinces 47 - 16), which with a variety of consequences continues today.

Transformation of cities is also affected by their socio-economic and political functions (state-administration, local and judiciary authorities' centres, etc.). For example, in Lesser Poland there are towns whose dominant function is recreation and tourism: Krynica, Piwniczna, Szczawnica, Rabka Zdrój or Zakopane. Those transformations occur in a different way in towns whose dominant function is industry, such as Trzebinia, Libiąż, Chelmek, Andrychów or Chrzanów. Those processes also look in a different way in towns around which strongly developed agriculture is focused, including Proszowice, Słomniki, Skąta, Kazimierza Wielka, etc.

The article outlines only those factors that have a direct impact on the transformation of cities — in the context of incentives ensuring preservation of existing workplaces and / or the creation of new ones. These outlines are necessarily superficial as nowadays the pressure of various factors related to the creation of workplaces is changing unpredictably, often quickly and dramatically — irrespective of characteristics previously assigned to the given localities or regions (defined e.g. as tourist, industrial or even agricultural ones).

It should also be mentioned that Lesser Poland is the most geographically diverse region in Poland. It pertains to landscape and colonial values, namely: the upland, submontane and mountainous areas. Urban and rural settlement falls within this physicogeographical conditioning determined by such colonial priorities as access to water, the communication network having a connection with national and international roads or prosperous agriculture.

After the Second World War, as a result of political and economic conditioning, the main strategy of formation and development of cities was transformed in a fundamental way. Priorities of the centrally planned economy (and its legal and ideological reflections) allowed decision-makers rather uninhibited treatment of private property, especially private land. On the

¹ In some studies, it is assumed that a small town has fewer than 10,000 inhabitants.

² The influence of political transformation processes on small towns in Lesser Poland has been researched by Agnieszka Kwiatek-Sołtys. *Małe miasta województwa małopolskiego w okresie transformacji systemowej*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, Kraków 2004, p. 8.

one hand, they were abusive (not to say looting under the guise of the law sometimes), but on the other hand, those practices generally excluded land speculation and even free trading in land in the natural development goals, notably to foster entrepreneurship. After 1989, the restoration of the principles of private property opened up the possibility of previously inhibited speculative land trading and its free circulation. As a result, the availability of relatively cheap land in the previously agricultural areas enabled to locate there various types of industrial plants, shopping centres and warehouses, housing developments, etc.

To control these processes (after diagnosing any abnormalities), it is necessary to have a specific concept and strategy. The inability to regulate these spatial and architectural problems in our country often ridicules us in the eyes of specialists in the field of planning and architecture from other countries... These disturbing phenomena and trends provoke a broad discussion among men of science and culture, especially among spatial planning and architecture professionals. Scientific discussions are, therefore, to identify and propose — through the exchange of views and experiences — possible solutions to the above identified problems.

Critical description of the situation

It is undisputed that after 1989 very thorough transformations took place in Poland. Their pace outdistanced both the pace (and possibilities) of spatial planning and the applicable legal standards related to architecture and management of space. Space, representing the shared value of the whole society, is in many respects treated carelessly, not to say — wastefully. Nature and landscape, cultural, agricultural, social, infrastructural values, and, above all, the requirements generally understood as **sustainable development** cease to count — for the crudely conceived “ad hoc” dominant, “arithmetical” economics and profit at (almost) all cost. Fig.1.

Figure 1. Fragment of a housing estate in Krzeszowice from the period of the 80s



Source: photo by H. Melges

Agricultural areas with high quality soil are reclassified in the majesty of the law into construction sites for expanding cities. Giant shopping centres with huge car parks are

constructed on the outskirts of these cities. The introduction of any radical changes in order to control those disastrous transformations of agricultural land (at the stages of variously advanced investment projects) has so far proved impossible.

The early attempts to order the situation

Synchronously speaking (or statically, in a given moment) the boundaries of cities are defined precisely, but in practice (diachronically, that is, in time) these boundaries are reviewed, and thus due to the very nature of urban sprawl – constantly enlarged (extended). In Lesser Poland as many as 31 out of 55 towns were located in the Middle Ages, most often on the Magdeburg law and less often on *sredenses* law (*ius Novi Fori*).

Fires but also the periods of partitioning in Poland had a huge impact on the transformation of cities (changing their spatial shape) – the invaders introduced foreign archetypes, styles and manners of building to the native Polish tradition. However, the destructive elements of various wars had the biggest impact. It should be (to be objective) noted, however, that, paradoxically different destructions changing or even completely eliminating the existing structure (shape) of cities or their districts fostered the introduction of new solutions and urban and architectural concepts — previously impossible due to the existing and permanent state of things.

As we know the first and second world wars caused particular havoc in the structures of cities. After World War I people attempted to solve problems connected with the destruction of cities by developing plans for their logically intrusive repair or reconstruction of buildings, expansions and new construction. The then outstanding legislative document in the field of planning and architecture was the unified building law of 1928. That law introduced a rule that plans for cities should take into account the functional and spatial dependence taking place in the relations between a city and the surrounding areas. The intention of these methods of planning were among others making integral, harmonious (and according to the hierarchy) plans interlocking with each other to — to increasingly lower levels of administration on a specific geographical space.

After World War II the destruction of cities in Poland exceeded 40% of their total assets. Industry (over 50%) and villages were destroyed even more. The war also decimated intelligentsia, that is, experts from various fields, including urban planners, architects, builders, etc. Inconceivable post-war poverty — in addition in politically altered conditions of real socialism — despite the huge public enthusiasm for the country's reconstruction from the devastation could not be (apart from certain exceptions³) guarantee for proper operations within the meaning of all decisions and planning, urban and architectural works. Noteworthy is also the fact of the great determination of planners and architects who survived from the war to implement the thoughts and experiences of the pre-war period in the country which was rebuilt after war. This determination demonstrates itself in the fact that already in 1946 a decree on “the planned land development of the country” was issued. It marked the three-tier system of planning: national planning, regional planning, planning of individual cities and towns. The primary requirement for these plans was to limit the movements of migrants in the destabilized

³ E.g. The total reconstruction of Warsaw's old town (and not only).

country (so as to obtain obvious and necessary stability), further — distribution of industry, setting the major transport and infrastructure routes.

In consequence of the following changes and verification of spatial plans different variants of planning were introduced, including: Act of 1961 on spatial planning and the government's resolution of 1976 on the rules and procedures for the preparation of local development plans⁴.

After 1989 a special legal act in an altered political and economic system was the “Law on Spatial Planning” from 1994. The novelty of this extraordinary act was that of entrusting local authorities with powers to create local plans. The main emphasis of this law was placed on the issues of sustainable development (an interdisciplinary perspective). So designated priority meant that many of the planning and architectural issues theoretically fitted into the modern and global trend of thinking about human environment. Another problem, however, which has remained was that of **competence of staff at this level** necessary (and independent from the influence of non-experts) to properly create such plans (to meet their leading and legitimate idea).

The author is only taking here a far-reaching shortcut — indications of planning procedures and acts which “created” our urban-rural spaces. All of them, however objectively “collide” with spatial and architectural effects — widely visible effects which most dramatically manifest themselves in a simply spatial and architectural clutter in urban and rural areas⁵.

Without knowing the broad context of the causes, understanding of the current state of planning and architecture is difficult. The conclusion may be that throughout the post-war period planning was strongly determined by the economic and social system. However, after 1989, the complexity of the political transformation of the socialist state into a radically different system of the capitalist state once again brought new methods and ways of spatial management. Yet, at the same time, that situation brought serious complications. It is therefore particularly important for the rapidly transforming cities — constantly being “the task of the moment” — is the introduction of restrictions on the mechanisms of forming a kind of planning and architectural chaos.

Determination of the place of residence - in the countryside or in the city?

The condition of good planning is the precise identification of issues relating to demography, workplaces, education, etc. The immediately post-war period in Poland was dominated by reconstruction from the devastation and the identification and preparation of places to live for frequently distributed human masses moving around the country and looking for “their place to anchor”.

⁴ The assessment of changes in urban planning after World War II in the context of political transformation was explored by Bolesław Malisz in the book *Problematyka przestrzennego zagospodarowania kraju*. Polskie Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1974, p. 23

⁵ The authors of the study: E. Radziszewski, W. Wieczorkiewicz and M. Wiśniewska diagnosed relations of legislative acts adopted after World War II in the face of the post-war Polish reality. *Planowanie przestrzenne i zabudowa wsi*. Arkady, Warszawa 1983, pp. 15-18

A particular example for the then Cracow and now Lesser Poland province is the city of Cracow. Before the war it was not an industrial city — industry employed only approx. 10% of the population. The residents of the city were mostly artisans, merchants, civil servants, students and academics. The situation changed fundamentally during the post-war population movement. Intelligentsia from Warsaw, Lvov and Vilnius and dispossessed as a result of land reform wealthy landowners looked for a new place to live in Cracow. Those decisions were often difficult (especially emotionally), burdened with uncertainty and future risk, but dictated by necessity and common sense.

A special and dramatic event for Cracow was the decision of 1949 to implement the biggest six-year investment plan (i.e. accelerated industrialization) — i.e. Vladimir Lenin Steelworks. Two villages near Cracow were requisitioned for its construction — Mogiła and Pleszów. This happened anyway — which is today commonly known — within the strict guidelines of a foreign power, namely the USSR to make Poland a supply base of raw and industrial material for heavy industry — for the final needs of the defence industry. Additionally native ideological factor was at stake — the desire of the then authorities to change the intelligentsia (and therefore always suspect and “reactionary”) character of the city to the character and image of class “workers”. The upstream population was to become a “cure” for the current state of affairs ⁶.

The expansion of steelworks progressed, making it a national juggernaut of heavy industry and a leading polluter of nature, and the destructive intoxication not only of public health but also the sights and in general the building substance of Cracow. The process of expansion continued uninterrupted until the end of the 80s. As a result, the city of 300 thousand has become the city of 800 thousand inhabitants due to the influx of people (necessary hands to work). Mostly immigrants from the mountainous villages and towns flocked here.

The demand for workers in the region was to be covered by people from the countryside, farmers generally subsistence ones, farming on small acreages of low or very low profitability. For those people, a source of additional, permanent and guaranteed income became a “lure” they could not refuse. Additionally, in the mentality of these people (skilfully shaped by the propaganda of the political system) migration to the city meant social ennoblement. Thus, in the whole Silesian-Cracow agglomeration evolved a special type of farming population commonly referred to as the “peasant-workers” — country people employed in the industry, who still (with their family) worked on the land after the work in the city. As a result, the boundaries of Lesser Poland cities steadily widened, absorbing additional areas of suburban village.

Socialist economy trends focused on the development of heavy industry were dramatically slowed down in 1990, which was connected with a reduction in employment. The population was forced to retrain — mainly in the fields of retail. Those changes had almost immediate consequences in the processes of spatial and architectural management. A fairly radical change is occurring — from the tendency to live in the cities to that of settling down in attractive rural areas adjoining or adjacent to cities.

⁶ Andrzej Delorme, „Stalinowska industrializacja przyczyną kłęski ekologicznej Krakowa” (in:) *Kłęska ekologiczna Krakowa*, collective work edited by Maria Gumińska and Andrzej Delorme, Kraków 1990, pp. 33-40

Return of urban population to rural areas

After 1990, as a result of the initiation of the market economy and the restructuring of industry, and therefore the reduction in the employment, people were forced to search for new ways of life, including earning money. New processes of settlement and location of homes and workplaces were indeed initiated in villages. For those who previously lived in the countryside, and were now living in cities, these processes were partly facilitated by the fact of still having family houses and land suitable for development and to create workplaces in villages: workshops, small production plants, processing plants, etc., and new the so-called dream houses.

It looked different in the case of materially well-off people who lived in cities. These people have become fed up with urbanized world and acknowledged that the values related to life in rural areas (social climate, peace, contact with nature) will release them from tiring, stressful, and at the same time “rigorous framework of urbanity”. Furthermore, currently the majority of people (not just the wealthy) have cars. There also exists a well-organized public transport – buses (also private ones) and rail to a lesser extent. Assuming that commuting from home in the countryside to work in the city takes an average of 30 minutes up to one hour, the decision to settle in the country ceases to be significantly difficult. The existing technologies of Internet (electronic) communication also open up new ways and methods of working from home (especially in the case of liberal professions, but not only).

This then raises an additional diagnostic question – do these people isolate themselves from the cities? A village is their place of residence, but their workplaces are still in cities. Their children continue to benefit from the schools located in cities. They use all kinds of urban amenities (cultural centres, cinemas, etc.); health care available to them is usually located in the city, etc. And so — the isolation or abandonment of relations does not occur.

There is also another question — will these rural (but half-hearted) inhabitants from the cities be accepted by local residents; is there a possibility of good integration in the presence of cultural and intellectual differences and creation of new local rules and customs of participation in the social life of these different groups? It seems that will take some time for these differences to be blurred in these new cultural and social relations. And there is still a number of such complex questions.

Suburban villages in new reality — spatial planning and architectural issues

The image of modern-day villages, especially these near the cities, is changing before our eyes. In the 50s of the last century **social realism** was “officially” introduced as a binding ideological and aesthetic directive (as regards the content and form) which brutally dissect cultural trends of native Polish architecture. After 1956 there was a return to modernism (although the relevance and meaning of the name is in the author’s opinion debatable here). Urban construction became dominated by precast technology, concrete slabs, and above all the technical and aesthetic mediocrity. Fig.2.

**Figure 2. The quality of technology in housing as a problem of many housing estates.
Krzeszowice – the beginning of the 90s**



Source: photo by H. Melges

In the case of Cracow, but also almost any city in Lesser Poland, among the many crises in the field of dehumanized urban planning and architecture (including urban-rural structures) simultaneously appeared crises of health of the residents of these cities, environmental problems and the problem of destruction of national culture. Historically shaped spatial structures of the village were in the majority blurred carelessly — with the introduction of new technologies, trends and architectural fashions (often erroneous or downright ignorant from the point of view of the art and science of architecture). Fot.3. Professor Juchnowicz — otherwise one of the creators of Nowa Huta — rightly notes that: “Gigantomania and totalism of housing estates is increasingly under attack”⁷ This finding is particularly relevant for the villages from the 70s and 80s.

Their ties with tradition were broken, the continuation of good practices and local archetypes were abandoned. Poor quality of construction and “non-quality” or poor quality of architectural eclecticism are the main features of the contemporary village in Lesser Poland. Fig.4.

⁷ Stanisław Juchnowicz, „Źródła patologicznej urbanizacji i kryzysu ekologicznego obszaru Krakowa” (in:) *Kłęska ekologiczna Krakowa*, collective work edited by Maria Gumińska and Andrzej Delorme, Kraków 1990, p. 250

Figure 3. View of the entrance to the town characteristic for many of our cities – the town of Zator



Source: photo by H. Melges

Figure 4. Fragment of “Ćmany” housing estate in Krzeszowice - the 70s



Source: photo by H. Melges

The period after 1990 is a time of great changes and attempts to catch up in terms of all kinds of construction. Access to new architectural solutions and increasingly better technologies and construction materials brought a boom in construction. However, there was no **planning and architectural preparation** for that boom. Strong (and sometimes even overwhelming) property developer lobbying determined the whole tracts of countryside with the new forms of building, often by creating isolated settlements, closed like a kind of ghetto. Although in the area of

planning and architecture regulatory limits for single-family housing has already been established, even these (as practice shows) did not properly immerse into the architectural and spatial shape and character of different localities.

Conclusions

Spatial-architectural changes since the days after World War II until now have been characterized by effective blurring of regional architectural and cultural diversity. As a result, the principle of good continuation, above all, has been broken (in the broad sense). Fig.5. Especially the new “suburban revolution” carries huge risks — selfish forms of overuse of rural areas by their new residents⁸. The speed of the occurring changes has long outdistanced zoning plans, somewhat paralyzing them from accomplishing. Fig.6.

Figure 5. View of single-family housing development in the neighbourhood of large blocks, Raclawicka Street in Cracow



Source: photo by H. Meiges

⁸ This complex issue is addressed by Marek Kowicki in the book *Patologie/wyzwania architektoniczno-planistyczne we wsi małopolskiej, studium na tle tendencji krajobrazowych i europejskich*. Kraków 210, p. 20

Figure 6. Characteristic process of expansion of residential development in former agricultural areas – the area near Olkusz



Source: photo by H. Melges

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